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ABSTRACT

This article describes the duties of a research librarian appointed to provide a comprehensive information service to the administration of an academic institution. Information, in the sense used here, refers to published information about other institutions and the outside world, not internal data on finance, staff, and students. The resultant service was a selective dissemination of information (SDI) of a corporate nature, that is, a single information service tailor-made to the needs of a small, relatively homogeneous group. It included those subjects which clients had requested and those items which could be important to the development of the institution, whether clients had requested them or not. An unexpected by-product of the corporate SDI was that it was used not only by senior management for current awareness but also retrospectively by the whole institution. As a result, as much as one-third of the time spent on the corporate SDI came to be devoted to bibliographic control. (Author)

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THE SELECTIVE DISSEMINATOR OF INFORMATION (SDI)

A NEW ROLE FOR THE LIBRARIAN?

by

T. H. Strehlow

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THE SELECTIVE DISSEMINATOR OF INFORMATION - (SDI)
A NEW ROLE FOR THE LIBRARIAN?

This article describes the duties of a research librarian, appointed to provide a comprehensive information service to the administration of an academic institution. Information, in the sense used here, refers to published information about other institutions and the outside world, not internal data on finance, staff and students. The resultant service was a selective dissemination of information (SDI) of a corporate nature, that is a single information service, tailor-made to the needs of a small, relatively homogeneous group. It included firstly those subjects which clients had requested and, secondly, those items which may have been important to the development of the institution, whether clients had requested them or not.

An unexpected by-product of the corporate SDI was that it was not only used by senior management for current awareness, but also retrospectively by the whole institution. As a result as much as one-third of the time spent on the corporate SDI came to be devoted to bibliographic control.

INFORMATION SYSTEMS

In July 1974 the Library Association of Australia (LAA) made a submission on the need for a reliable information delivery system in Australia, claiming that:

'The information avalanche has created tremendous problems for professional workers and for the population in general. There has been exponential growth in the amount of information available and this has made it difficult to identify what is available, to gain access to it and to ensure its prompt delivery.' (3:1)

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The submission went on to say that while the computer appeared to offer solutions to some of the problems

'At present there is no large information system in the world which can match the information services in a small public or special library for real-time information delivery'. (3:1)

WHAT IS INFORMATION?

'Information avalanche' and similar expressions have become overworked catchcries. The administrator or executive of any institution needs information for problem-solving and decision-making. Much of this information is data from internal files which is generated by the institution's own departments. In an educational institution some examples of this are the internal files on matters like finance, staff and students. However, when people speak of 'information avalanche' they rarely distinguish between internal information and that which exists outside these files.

The former is more amenable to computer processing because there is not much doubt about which parts of it are important and it is a relatively small amount. Various educational management systems are available in computer-based packages, which handle enrolment, finance, staffing and student evaluation data. While such information is essential to any institution, it is mainly a problem for middle-level management, once senior management has decided on the systems' specification. From time to time changes will be necessary, usually imposed from outside, for example if the federal or state government wishes more data on specific items.

At that point it will once again become a matter for senior management.

The real information overload refers to the information which exists outside such files. It has occurred because we live in an age of rapidly increasingly published material and because of continual change. Two important writers on the problems of handling and using information, de Solla Price (6) and Anderla (1) have demonstrated this. The former is talking about science rather than education, but says that 80% to 90% of all scientists that have ever lived are alive now and that the growth of scale of information is exponential and has been maintained for two or three centuries (6:1, 6:5). Anderla also talks about the exponential or logistic growth of knowledge and predicts that to cope with it the automation of information 'will happen in the decade 1980-1990' (1:69). He is referring not to the automation of internal data, but to specialized data banks which will analyse scientific and technical reports, centralize abstracts of PhD theses (both by 1979) and catalogue and store industrial patents (by 1980).

This extra information would not be a problem to administrators except that the greater interdependence between institutions and the outside world, caused by rising costs, greater federal control and the need to cope with the uncertainty of continual change, has forced administrators to become more aware of what is going on outside their own institutions. This information appears not in unpublished data banks, but in the form of the printed word: books, articles, published papers, government reports etc. For any single institution or user group much of this outside information is irrelevant and yet, paradoxically, there are also many

gaps in information, owing to continuous change and because nobody has yet bothered to write about some new problem.

It has always been the job of librarians to gather, order and make accessible the printed word. Today a new role is opening up: that of sifting what comes in and supplying selected information to a defined group of users on a regular basis. This is the function of SDI, or the selective dissemination of information. In Britain a newspaper like the 'Times Higher Education Supplement' can help serve this function for administrators in the field of higher education. It has a wide range of material on education, eg reviews of green and white papers, short news items on what has happened, announcements about what is to happen, several pages on developments in other countries, especially European non-communist and North American countries, and one or two long evaluative articles. A further bonus is that it appears weekly. Australia lacks any such specialized newspaper. Developments in education are happening all the time and some are reported in a variety of journals. Even just to put in the major trends on various areas of interest to senior educational administrators one can draw on as many as 90 journals in a year.

ON-LINE INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Since the 1974 LAA submission there have been some further developments in automated information systems and the latest panacea for librarians is an on-line information network, offering access from one terminal to a range of data bases. Anderla had predicted that specialized data banks would be in operation by 1979 (1:69). In Australia this network is

is called AUSINET. While not doubting the importance of such comprehensive networks to both librarians and to the public at large I would still agree with the LAA submission cited above that at present no large information system can match that of a special library for real-time delivery and in addition would claim that there is, and will continue to be, a role for SDI. For one thing there will probably always be some time-lag between the publication of an item and its appearance in a data bank. Secondly, even with good subject headings it is difficult to be as relevant as one wishes. This means that the heading is either sufficiently broad to include 80% to 90% of material which is outside the user's scope, or else very narrow and hence misses items of interest. A further weakness is that new subjects are always being introduced. Unless the administrator takes some time to do his own reading, independently of his SDI service, he will be unaware of this.

Rather than expect the user to be continually on the watch for new developments in his area he should be able to relax, confident that his information-provider, be it research assistant, private secretary or research librarian, will monitor new developments and include them in the SDI. One writer in librarianship who appears to see the problem in this way is Wasserman, who says that librarians are failing 'because they are morally and physically bound to physical plant, rather than to clienteles and problem solving'. (7:xi)

SDI

A good definition of SDI is provided by Housman (2:222):

'A typical SDI service provides each subscriber with a periodic, tailored listing of new documents that have been entered into the file and that are likely to apply to his work or be of interest to him as a professional. In such a system, each subscriber gets a different set of references, depending on his particular interests, as defined in his "interest profile"'.

Clearly one factor essential for a successful SDI, if one accepts the above definition, is that any changes in the interest profile must be communicated by the user to the person in charge of the SDI, so that relevance is maintained. In practice this is something quite difficult to obtain.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SERVICE

In 1975 one of the Victorian CAEs specializing in teacher education, advertised for a research librarian, one of whose duties was to keep the senior administrators up-to-date with outside developments in education. One of the services was the inauguration of a weekly SDI in January 1976. The first SDIs were fairly short (perhaps five to ten items long) and were based on the interest profiles of two of the six senior administrators whom it had been possible to interview over the holiday period. These SDIs lacked abstracts and subject headings. As a result they were relatively quick to compile. However, by the third issue material was grouped into books, journal articles, newspaper cuttings and bibliographies.

In February all six senior administrators were interviewed to ascertain which journals they read regularly and what their main subject interests

were. While one could have completely ignored those journals which everybody read , for example, 'The Age', 'Educational Magazine', 'Australian Journal of Advanced Education', they were included for comprehensiveness. This decision has not been regretted. It was quite evident in the interviews that there was a good deal of overlap between interests, especially among four members who interests were fairly wide-ranging. Also in the initial SDI issues it had been noticed how time-consuming it was to read material, choose items, make photocopies and then make up individual packets. A further consideration was the need for subsequent bibliographic control.

All these factors had led to an initial grouping approach so that two lists could serve for everyone. However, in the interviews members were asked for their comments about the first issues and all said they would not object to a single list circulating from member to member. This led to the production of a single SDI for six persons, or a corporate SDI.

CORPORATE SDI OR MACRO-PROFILE

The concept of corporate author has been with the library profession for over one hundred years now, since Panizzi began its use in the British Museum Library. It covers the case of one or more persons writing for a single body such as a business firm, an art gallery or a government department. Similarly the concept 'corporate SDI' refers to the information needs of a small, fairly homogeneous group of people. In the case under discussion the group consisted of the six senior

administrators of a single-purpose, multi-disciplinary CAE. In its 17th annual report the National Library of Australia uses a similar concept but calls it 'macro-profile' (5:36) and claims this to be the basis for its current-awareness bulletins in education.

Any administrator probably reads regularly at most half-a-dozen specialist journals. He may not read other relevant journals at all and may read some relevant journals only occasionally. Consequently important pieces of information will escape his notice. The person preparing the corporate SDI has to scan regularly a much larger body of journals, books and government reports. In the corporate SDI he should include firstly those items which his clients have requested and secondly those items which are important to the present and future development of the institution, whether his clients have asked for them or not. This second point may be contentious and will be referred to again later. One consequence of this is that the producer of the corporate SDI carries some real responsibility and must do more than glance at the titles of the articles in a number of journals.

The advantages of a corporate SDI for the producer are that only one text circulates to all members, and so better bibliographic control is possible. Also the readers can be informed about major decisions by other departments or government bodies which may affect their areas, even if only indirectly. A further advantage is that one administrator does not operate in a vacuum of not knowing whether his fellow has also read something which came in his own personalized SDI. The disadvantage of a corporate SDI is that not all material in a batch is relevant to

any one reader. However, after two years of the corporate SDI one user made the comment that at present he pays for one profile from a commercial SDI service. As the cost is quite high he intentionally chose a broad subject heading. As a result only 25% of the material sent is appropriate and yet through the corporate SDI he was able to pick up some very relevant material on this subject which the commercial system missed, even though it claims to be a personalized information service.

AN SDI PROVIDES ONLY PUBLISHED INFORMATION ABOUT OTHER INSTITUTIONS AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD

Information ranges from the general to the very specific. Data about the number of students doing BEd courses in Australia is general and would be supplied by an outside source or sources. Data about the number of students doing a BEd in one's own institution is very specific and would come out of internal files. The main limitation of any SDI service, whether it is produced in a library or a commercial environment, is that it relies exclusively on the printed word. In that sense there will be no overheard conversations from Ministers, no interesting gossip, no possibility of reading the Budget before it has been announced over the air or reported in newspapers. Providing the SDI is up-to-date any information can appear on the same day as it is published, but not before. This means in practice (a) that it is available to the public and (b) that there is some time-lag. A further point which must be stressed is that the printed word means only 'that which has been published'. Therefore an SDI excludes: minutes of meetings, correspondence between members and their peers in other institutions, internal figures, tables and statistics generated by departments within the institution.

CRITERIA FOR INCLUSION IN THE CORPORATE SDI

Listed below are some very general criteria on what constitutes information for my user group. Anything financial always has ramifications and so any statement by the Federal or State Minister for Education to do with money can be considered for inclusion. Another important factor in deciding what to include is 'Who said it?'. For example a statement about poor teacher training in Victoria takes on an entirely different colour if it comes from the Victorian Minister for Education, the Secretary of the VTU or an enraged parent whose child is at present unemployed. A third important variable is the time factor. Does an article refer to what has been done or only what it is proposed to do? A further aspect to consider is that Australia is locked into the world economy. Many people who said confidently three years ago that the over-production of teachers in England and Europe would never happen in Victoria were very surprised in 1977, and yet an elementary understanding of the tendency for Australia to follow European/North American trends plus a monitoring of the Australian birth rate, would have alerted them to the probability of it occurring here too. Less money for higher education, the closing of teachers' colleges, student unrest and revived interest in technical education are just a few of the issues which appeared in the overseas press before they made the headlines in Australia.

A final factor is whether the information has reverberations in the community. Articles on literacy have occurred fairly often in the SDIs, not because I think it is so noteworthy, nor because the problem was unknown to my users, but owing to the way it became a cause célèbre

with the daily press and even educational journals throughout the western world. Such publicity is important because it influences the way the public see educational institutions, especially teachers' colleges, and later influences politicians and the amount of money they are prepared to vote for education and in what breakdown, for example an increase for primary schools and a decrease in funds for higher and second degrees.

INCLUDING MATERIAL WHICH CLIENTS DID NOT SPECIFICALLY ASK FOR

Housman's definition of 'interest profile' required regular feedback to ensure that it was kept up-to-date. In practice, asking people what interests them is not very productive. They tend to reply 'and...and' rather than 'either...or', in other words they will say that A is quite important and B is also quite important, rather than that A is important and B is not. Without regular feedback it is hard to keep the interest profile up-to-date. In the previous paragraphs I listed the types of information included and why. The administrators did not ask specifically for information about the new Tertiary Education Commission, but as it will be co-ordinating higher education in Australia and will help to determine how much money will be available for CAEs it should be obviously included. A similar discretion is needed when making a choice between several similar items. It is amazing how much information is published in a multiplicity of forms. What is said in parliament is published in Hansard, but much of it is also reproduced the next day in newspapers. Some of it may also get into news-sheets of professional associations. So the same item may be published three times.

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It is less true to talk of an information avalanche than of an avalanche of printed material. There is a relatively small core of information which appears in a multitude of print and non-print forms.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The list of journals scanned gradually expanded and changed over the two years, but it can be broken into five main types. The first group contains the official statements of ministers of education. This will obviously affect the CAEs. The next group is the journals of professional educational associations, for example Australian Conference of Principals of CAEs, FSAACAE and FAUSA. A third group is journals written principally by and for academics. Here one often learns of successful experiments or evaluations of experiments which failed. A fourth group is journals for practising teachers, such as 'Education News', which is Australia-wide, and 'Educational Magazine' which describes the Victorian scene. A final group is newspapers or journals which are either specialist or general. For the latter to be scanned they must have articles on education relatively frequently and must be important because they help to create public opinion, for example, 'National times', 'Bulletin' and 'Times Higher Education Supplement'. Over a two-year period the ten most cited journals were: 'Australia. Senate Debates', 'Times Higher Education Supplement', 'Age', 'Australian', 'Australia. House of Representatives Debates', 'National Times', 'Bulletin', 'Commonwealth Record', 'Change', 'Careers Weekly'. These ten titles provided over 65% of all journal citations. The other 35% of citations came from another sixty titles. Quite apart from the journals are books and government reports on education.

In August 1976 the first full user survey was conducted. In the opinion of the senior administrators the most useful things about the SDI were: the photocopies from articles etc., the accompanying comments and the table of contents, followed, a long way down, by newspaper cuttings and bibliographies. Bibliographies received such a poor rating that they were subsequently discontinued. At that time the table of contents merely meant author and title, sometimes only title in the case of newspaper cuttings. One question listed 13 subject areas which had appeared over the months in newspaper cuttings. Of these, five were rated very important or important by five of the six senior administrators, 3 were important to only one or two, while the remaining 5 were of no importance to anyone. (See Note for more details). The last five topics were then excluded from future issues altogether while the next three were only included if they seemed especially important.

By this time work on the weekly SDI was taking from 15 to 18 hours. This included looking through new books on education, scanning journals and reading some articles, scanning the national Hansard, photocopying relevant sections of an item, preparing and typing up a table of contents and sending off one copy of the finished product for circulation to all members of the Administration Committee.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS WITH SDI

One thing which seemed obvious after the first full survey was the need for better bibliographic control to help with subsequent literature searches and to prevent unintentional duplication. Hence from mid-September 1976 more complete bibliographic information was given, abstracts of articles and books were prepared and each item was numbered. To gain time for this the comments, which had hitherto accompanied the table of contents, had to be discontinued. In other words, the service was moving independently along the path already taken by similar services in parliamentary libraries such as 'Alert'. Just before the end of the first year a second user survey showed that all Members liked the SDI abstracts and that the items were more relevant than prior to September 1976.

GREATER SELECTIVITY IN 1977

By the end of 1977 there were only half as many items as in 1976, because less time was available for work on the SDI. The surveys had indicated that Members preferred greater selectivity and better bibliographic control, even at the cost of delay in appearance and so it was decided to select the arbitrary number of 24 items for each issue.

From March 1977, due to wider use made of the SDI, it was decided to give every item a subject heading and, where necessary, make 'see' and 'see also' references. By now the breakdown of time to produce a single issue of the SDI was as follows:

Scanning new books and government reports	2 hours
Scanning new journals	4-5 hours
*Scanning Hansard	3-4 hours
Writing summaries	8 hours
Assigning subject headings	1½ hours
Typing	1 hour
Photocopying, guillotining and stapling	2½ hours
Proof-reading and waiting for corrections	1 hour
Collating, sorting and sending out	½ hour
	Total 23½-25½ hours

*When House is sitting.

From this one can see how much work bibliographic control demands, viz. 9½ hours. This was shortly afterwards increased by another two or three hours when the need was realized for a complete index to all items, which had to be constantly updated and expanded. And this is relatively slight bibliographic control. For example, the items in the SDI were arranged by importance rather than alphabetically. In addition only the index was cumulative, no attempt was made to put all the items from four months into one alphabetic sequence. By comparison most libraries doing similar work put out annual alphabetic cumulations instead of an index. To help overcome the big time lag of two or three weeks between issues a hot-line service was instigated, whereby items of exceptional importance were sent out at once and listed as 'excerpts' of the next SDI. As few as a dozen items had to go out in this form in 1977.

By March 1977 then the SDI had settled into a fairly final format. The number of journals scanned remained relatively constant and all items chosen received an abstract, a subject heading and a running number.

The contact with the members of the Administration Committee ensured that the items chosen remained relevant, although obviously some members have a wider subject interest than others. The upper limit of 24 items per issue and at most two issues per month (as against a weekly issue in 1976) forced a much greater degree of selectivity. To accommodate this, subjects were followed in a more economical way. This meant an initial coverage of an issue, follow-up only if there were any developments and perhaps a final mention if there was some measurable outcome. An example of this is the Karen Green case, first listed in the SDI of 10 February 1977. The next reference is on 31 May when Senator Guilfoyle replied to a question on notice that Ms Green was not qualified to receive an unemployment benefit because she 'had not taken reasonable steps to obtain work'. In spite of several further references the matter was not included again until Senator Guilfoyle said in the Senate on 19 October that a bill relating to social service amendments will 'provide for a postponement of six weeks for payment...to school leavers from the date they leave school'. In 1976 far more references to this same case would have been included.

FINAL REVIEW

By December 1977 a further 19 SDIs had been produced. The time now seemed appropriate for another review. Members replied that they liked the greater bibliographic control and the fact that I included new subject areas on my own judgement, instead of waiting for them to request it, they said that coverage of subjects of interest and of Australian material was about right, although two said there was too much material from overseas. One said they were more relevant, three about the same, one less and one did not answer. Four said the SDIs had made them better equipped to handle

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their own daily information problems at work and two were uncertain. Three regarded the SDI as essential or a useful adjunct, one as useful but in need of some changes, one as non-essential but useful and one as of only marginal use. The majority needed one hour to read through the SDI.

This last fact seems to be the main justification for a corporate SDI, namely, that a busy senior administrator can, in a few hours a month, keep abreast of items of interest and, at the same time, be aware of the range of information being supplied to his associates, so that he does not feel obliged to send on articles of particular interest to those on the mailing list. Each administrator still reads from choice his own select core of journals, but the SDI draws on material from a total of about 70 journal titles, as well as from books and government documents.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO ACQUIRING INFORMATION

(a) Centralised Services

Instead of a single institution employing one person for about 15 hours per week to prepare a corporate SDI there are other solutions. One is to make use of commercial or centralised services, such as those provided by the Social Science Citation Index or by the National Library. The problem of these services is that they lack any human interface, someone who knows his users and their information needs and can include some items and reject others. Any centralised system which produces for many users has to rely on a classification system or on subject headings. Both of these are still relatively imprecise. I do

not believe that the computer will enable greater precision. The way the human mind works is still too complex, as any student of spoken languages can verify. There is not even a simple one to one relationship between English and German or English and French. In the same way any article can usually be read from several points of view and it is rare that a classification scheme or a subject heading exactly fits it. Likewise information services such as APAIS, ERIC or 'Australian Education Index' are for the relatively comprehensive, not the selective dissemination of information. The subject heading approach is also a weakness as the alphabet disperses items which may be closely related and there is the additional handicap of time-lag. Articles in the above-mentioned services are usually at least several months old before they are included. Government publications are generally not included in services which scan journals, and likewise most newspaper cuttings are considered too ephemeral for inclusion.

(b) Problem-solving

A different approach to providing information might be problem-solving. As stated earlier, everything which appears in an SDI always has first to have been published. But there are myriad pieces of information which exist, which are collated and which a few people know how to get their fingers on, but which are unpublished. What is more use to an administrator who wants to know about Mature Age Students in teaching: an article written by a journalist from the 'National Times' concentrating on the scene inside universities, or the number of Mature Age Students in Victoria, their success in study and a few details on the ease with which they got jobs after graduation, which can be obtained by ringing up the various Admissions'

or Statistical Officers? The newspaper article of course has the advantage of the author's perspective and personal viewpoint, but any administrator can make some use of raw data. There is also no doubt that universities are far better and more richly documented than CAEs and, in fact, often one can only find printed material about the university scene and has to assume that there will be similar problems and answers in the CAE environment.

In the US some of this information is available from various computer-based educational information systems. Mellor, reviewing the OTIS system, established in 1968 in the State of Oregon after it had been in operation for some six years, found that:

'the overwhelming use.../made of the system/ is for Student Services, particularly the files containing student enrolment data. The Personnel files are the next most frequently accessed, followed by Payroll'. (4:103)

These are the three areas which were defined in the introduction as information best available from internal files, and not proper SDI material, which needs some human interpretation of raw data, be it in the form of an article, a graph or a table.

Short of such a state-wide computer system a problem-solving approach would rely on building up contacts with officers on tertiary institution campuses and still lack the interface with the world at large. Most tertiary institutions are more concerned with their students while they are studying and rarely bother to maintain much contact after graduation. Also the time involved in the problem-

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solving approach would be so great that one could only look at a few topics. A matter such as the attitude of a political party towards education can be answered promptly to some extent from their own propaganda, and more perceptively, from other sources, but only to a limited extent from internal university or CAE records, and yet this attitude can have a very large effect on the total budget for education, as well as the amount allocated to individual institutions.

SUMMING UP

The alternatives to a corporate SDI service for senior management are three: firstly, no service at all which means that senior management will often be caught unawares. While this may not matter to some institutions, in the current climate of cutting back on expenditure for education, of the creation in June 1977 of the Tertiary Education Commission and with present Victorian reality of the Partridge Report, it is probably better to be exploring some of the options for institutional survival. In addition CAEs are still looking for a role. While the Martin Committee may have said over ten years ago 'different from but complementary to' in practice CAEs seem to spend a good deal of their time apeing universities. A corporate SDI service can help make administrators aware that there are other roles.

A second alternative to a corporate SDI is to use a commercial or centralised service. This will involve the risk of missing some relevant items while at the same time overburdening the administrators with irrelevant information.

The third alternative might be problem-solving. This looks like a very useful option, but it will be more costly in terms of hours required, it

will have to rely on systems like OTIS or on contacts being built up between opposite numbers in other institutions and it ignores the fact that in any system of co-operation there is still often some competition. At a time of rationalization each institution hopes that it will be the other institution which is either abolished, cut back or has its options reduced, and so there will always be some witholding of information. Furthermore any exchange of information will still often be annulled by decisions and events from outside the system and so some form of SDI will be needed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

If then one accepts the idea that a corporate SDI service is worth having there are several preconditions for its optimum efficiency. Firstly it should be a separate unit, which uses the library as a resource. If librarians wish to remain influential they might like to provide the dissemination However, there is considerable evidence that they will resist this role. Wasserman discusses such possibilities at length in his book 'The new librarianship' which first appeared in 1972. Even six years later it is not widely known among the library profession and has not sparked off the sort of debate it merits. Two citations are worth quoting here: 'Libraries remain predominantly passive agencies... oriented powerfully to the book rather than to the client' (7:4) and 'Those who function in an institution - social work, education, librarianship - are employees subject to organisational requisites'. (7:59) Both comments are adequately borne out by my own experience.

This separate unit needs some form of continuing link with its clientele and should possibly have two formal meetings a year. It is also good if the provider of the corporate SDI prepares any special bibliographies requested by the administrators, for in this way one learns of new interests. A small autonomous unit can provide the maximum help for the minimum work. There is no doubt though that if a librarian is employed for this service he is pulled in two opposing directions: one is the production of the corporate SDI on a day-to-day basis, the other is trying to make this available to the needs of a wider audience and to make retrospective searches possible. To this end one constantly tries to improve the bibliographic side. Yet in the answer to the questionnaire at the end of 1977, all six users said that they used the SDI mainly for current awareness, four used the subject headings for retrospective retrieval sometimes and two never. Without the bibliographic paraphernalia one would save about 9½ hours per week. Of course outside users would be heavily disadvantaged and at times there would be some difficulty in identifying an item retrospectively, but it probably would not involve 9½ hours per week.

CONCLUSION

I wish now to return to the second half of my title: 'a new role for the librarian?'. Even on-line information systems need someone to co-ordinate them. According to Housman 1972 was a year of advancement for SDI but also one when operating costs came to the fore. He said further that:

'the major stumbling block to further significant progress in SDI revolves around that issue of data base compatability.' (2:237)

While AUSINET may be an improvement in this regard, the basic problems of subject headings and classification still remain, which are always compounded by viewpoint and user population. Librarians are particularly well equipped to handle this. A basic justification for a corporate SDI is that it taps knowledge from any published or public source, whereas many data bases are split by format, for example ERIC lists documents, that is, books and government reports in one base and journal articles in another. In the absence of any commercial service the person in charge of the corporate SDI must do the work himself, be it reviewing a book, summarising a goyernment report or going through hansard. As soon as some regular service appears this can be discontinued (see footnote). However, to date there is still a great need for human interface which I believe will continue.

Note: Since 1977 the Australian Conference of Principals of CAEs has begun an internal service which reproduces the Australian federal hansard as well as key articles from the 'Times Higher Education Supplement'. The person doing the corporate SDI can then decide whether to cease making a selection and preparing abstracts, or whether to circulate in toto, but in any case this new service saves some time.

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